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DIRECTORATE OF
INTELLIGENCE

MEMORANDUM

The Situation in Vietnam

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ARCHIVAL RECORD
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Information as of 1600
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HIGHLIGHTS

3.3(h)(2) Military action around Khe Sanh was light during the past twenty-four hours although there are [REDACTED] indicators of impending large-scale enemy activity in Quang Tri Province.

3.3(h)(2) I. The Military Situation in South Vietnam:
Enemy action was light on 25 January but there are [REDACTED] indicators of impending enemy activity in Quang Tri Province (Paras. 1-9). There are increased indications that a widespread, coordinated enemy offensive may be imminent in the western highlands and coastal provinces of I and II Corps (Paras. 10-19).

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III. Military Developments in North Vietnam:
Additional information on the flight of two MIGs to southern North Vietnam indicates that they intended to land but were intercepted by US aircraft (Paras. 1-4).

IV. Other Communist Military Developments:
There is nothing of significance to report.

V. Communist Political Developments:

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French press agency correspondent in Hanoi reports that the city is taking on a festive air in anticipation of Tet (Paras. 4-5). Hanoi has offered only limited comment thus far on the Pueblo incident (Para. 6).

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I. THE MILITARY SITUATION IN SOUTH VIETNAM

1. Communist-initiated activity in the immediate vicinity of the base at Khe Sanh was generally light and sporadic on 25 January following a 250-round artillery barrage on 24 January. [REDACTED]

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[REDACTED] indicators suggest, however, that this current Communist campaign in western Quang Tri Province will intensify sharply before the Tet holiday period.

2. Incomplete reports show US Marine losses at 25 killed and 164 wounded since 20 January. Most of the casualties are from shellings and small-scale probes. Some 300 enemy bodies have been counted.

3. The use of 152-mm. artillery, the largest artillery weapon in the Communist's inventory in South Vietnam, during the bombardment of Khe Sanh on 24 January has been confirmed. The weapons, which have a range of just under 11 miles, were probably fired from positions to the northeast of the base or from ridges to the southwest, possibly in Laos itself. The sanctuary of the Demilitarized Zone is beyond the range.

4. Continuing interrogation of a North Vietnamese defector, [REDACTED]

[REDACTED] sheds additional light on the over-all strategy and unit dispositions of the enemy in the area. The parent unit of the defector, the North Vietnamese 325C Division, allegedly had recently been reinforced with two antiaircraft battalions. Each of the division's three regiments had an antiaircraft company armed with six to nine 12.7-mm. machine guns.

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5. This weapon, which is similar to the US 50-cal. machine gun, has been seen in both North Vietnamese and Viet Cong units in various sections of the country for some time and is used in ground support actions as well as an antiaircraft weapon. Deployment of this weapon on hills surrounding the Khe Sanh base together with the large numbers of US aircraft involved in the greatly intensified tactical air support effort at Khe Sanh probably accounts for the unusually large number--eight--of US aircraft downed in the past week.

6. The defector also stated that the mission of the North Vietnamese 325C Division is to "overrun Khe Sanh, but not to hold it." This attack would coincide with simultaneous attacks by the enemy main force units in the eastern half of the province. He also claimed that the enemy's offensive would be supported by North Vietnamese aircraft and tanks.

7. Although aircraft support for Communist troops in South Vietnam appears questionable, the tactical employment of armored vehicles by the enemy cannot be ruled out. There have been earlier reports of armored personnel carriers and self-propelled artillery weapons in southern North Vietnam. Armored vehicles were also reported used by the enemy on 24 January when an element of the North Vietnamese 325C Division overran a Laotian base camp just west of the Quang Tri Province border.

8. [REDACTED] sighting tracked vehicles, possibly tanks, traveling east on Route 9 in Laos. Despite these reports, the terrain in the Khe Sanh area is unsuitable for their use. These vehicles may instead be intended to protect supply areas and infiltration points. Their mobility gives them an advantage in this role.

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Hanoi Supports and Distorts Saigon Seminars

5. Hanoi radio has taken note of two seminars held recently in Saigon to discuss the peace issue and claims that the seminars were open criticisms of the "increasing US intervention in Vietnamese internal affairs" and denunciations of the corruption and failure of the "US-puppet clique." The seminars in actuality concentrated entirely on peace and negotiations--from opposite viewpoints--and mentioned the US only to decry alleged unilateral peace efforts.

6. One seminar was held on 21 January by the Catholic Greater Solidarity Forces and took a hard line on negotiations. The seminar issued a resolution opposing all "plots" to negotiate with the Liberation Front and demanding that the government take appropriate steps to dispel fears about the establishment of a coalition government. The meeting was held probably as much to reassure radical elements of the Greater Solidarity Forces that the group's leadership is still firmly opposed to any unfavorable settlement as it was to express a genuine concern about a possible coalition. There is also the possibility, advanced by the US Embassy, that the seminar was the idea of the government or elements in the government. Although the regime came in for considerable criticism, the tone of the seminar amounted to an endorsement of the government's position.

7. The second seminar was held by a group of university professors who issued an impassioned plea for immediate negotiations to avoid further bloodshed. Although the resolution could serve Communist propaganda purposes, its details were not played up in the Hanoi broadcast and it does not appear to represent the opinion of the academic community in general. Most of the resolution's 65 signatories, according to the embassy, are minor lights, mostly extremist Buddhists, leftist Catholics, and sincere but naive young professors.

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8. In a lengthy "state of the nation" address before a joint session of the National Assembly on 25 January, President Thieu reiterated familiar positions on a negotiated settlement of the war. He stated that bombing of North Vietnam could not be stopped unless all hostilities ceased, but added that bombing could be reduced proportionately if the Communists decreased their efforts. He noted recent confusion sown by Communist propaganda regarding a coalition government in the South, and reaffirmed the unacceptability of this concept, which he termed an effort to conquer South Vietnam from within by political means.

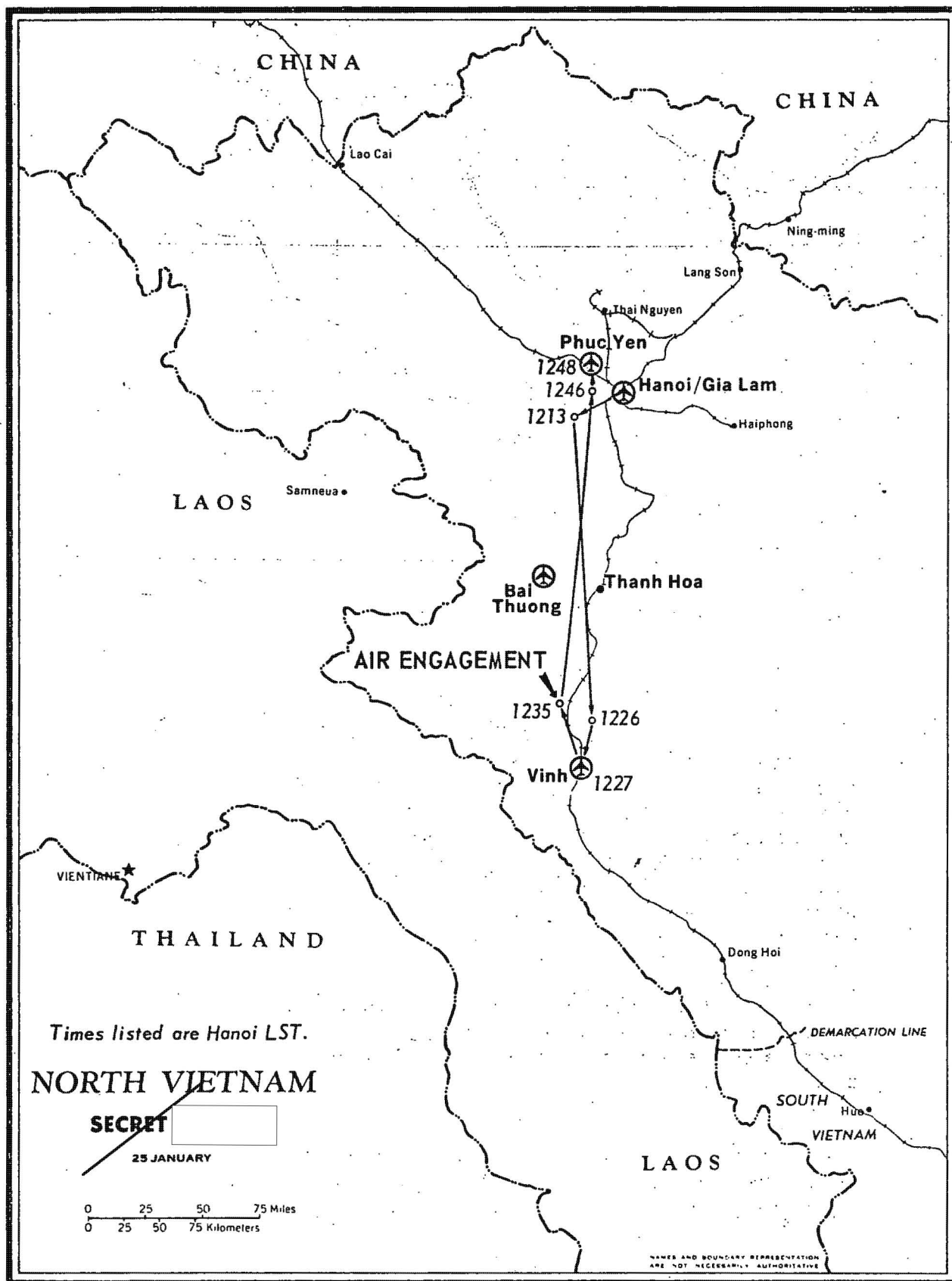
9. Thieu considerably softened his earlier criticism that the US might be indirectly playing into Communist hands by exploring the possibility of unilateral negotiations with North Vietnam. He stressed instead the importance of US assistance and the essential identity of purpose between Saigon and Washington despite minor differences. He repeated, however, that South Vietnam must determine its own future and that a political solution depends principally upon the leaders of North and South Vietnam.

10. Although a complete test of Thieu's remarks on domestic issues is not yet available, he evidently stressed his plans for reforms of both civil and military administration. He spelled out few details and gave no precise timetable for pending reorganizations. He presented in some detail programs submitted by various ministries, and announced a 95-billion piaster (\$800,000,000) budget, broken down to 66 percent for defense, 20 percent for economic, social and educational programs, and 10 percent for development. He declared that South Vietnam would meet more of its expenditures through its own resources this year, promising improved tax collection and the eventual submission of new tax legislation to the assembly. Thieu appealed for national unity and cooperation between the executive and the legislature and for understanding on the partial mobilization law which he declared would be implemented firmly but equitably and with continued student deferments.

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III. MILITARY DEVELOPMENTS IN NORTH VIETNAM

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2. The attempted landing at Vinh may indicate that North Vietnam is trying to establish at least a limited jet fighter capability in the panhandle region. Three MIG-21 flights in the Thanh Hoa - Vinh area have been noted so far this year. Fighters based in this region could oppose US air strikes on infiltration routes and might support North Vietnamese Army operations in the vicinity of the Demilitarized Zone. A North Vietnamese soldier who defected a few days ago at Khe Sanh reported that Communist forces in that area would be supported by North Vietnamese aircraft.

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4. It is possible that the runway at Vinh has been repaired in the past three weeks. If Hanoi elected to use Vinh as an emergency field, only limited facilities would be required. Soviet-built

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fighters are designed to operate from primitive air-strips and would require no maintenance or hangar facilities if the field were used only as an occasional refueling and re-arming station.

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IV. OTHER COMMUNIST MILITARY DEVELOPMENTS

1. There is nothing of significance to report.

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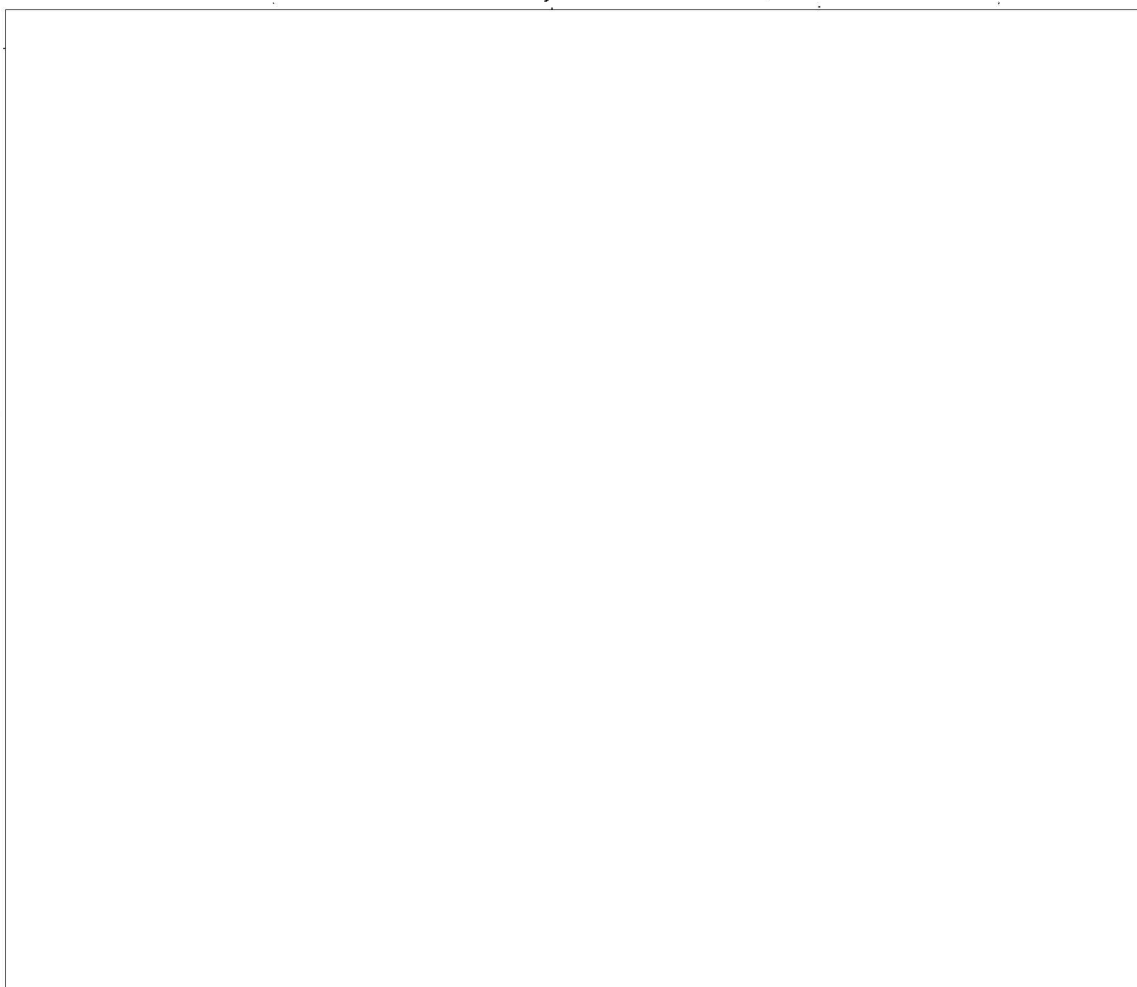
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V. COMMUNIST POLITICAL DEVELOPMENTS

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Hanoi Prepares for Tet

4. Hanoi is taking on a festive air in anticipation of the celebration next week of the lunar new year (Tet), according to an account by the AFP correspondent there. He reports that the city is crowded with evacuees returning from the countryside to take part in traditional family reunions and notes that the reappearance of children is especially striking. The report says there were no air raid warnings in the city in the five days prior to 24 January and this contributed to a more relaxed atmosphere.

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5. In contrast to last year when strict limitations were placed on the celebrations, including only a half-day holiday, the government has extended this year's holiday period by two-and-a-half days, placed more goods on display in state stores, and provided extra food rations and holiday specialities. While encouraging the populace to celebrate "joyfully and enthusiastically", the regime has also cautioned against excess which would not be in keeping with wartime conditions. In particular, stress was placed on preventing the festivities from interfering with agricultural and security or weakening the country's antiaircraft defenses.

North Vietnamese Reaction to Pueblo Incident

6. In brief reports on 24 and 25 January, Hanoi radio rehashed North Korean material on the seizure of the Pueblo and called the incident part of a US plan of "war provocation and preparation" in South Korea. There was no attempt to link the incident with the situation in Vietnam. The party daily Nhan Dan on 25 January described the Pueblo affair as another provocative act against North Korea which has "further aggravated tension in that part of the world."

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